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Department of State

TELEGRAM
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3/17/77

CONTROL 2053
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INDICATE:
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ACTION:

GDS
SHUM PINS PFOR AR US
Argentine Reactions to Human Rights Issue

ACTION: SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO: AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
() Release (X) Excise () Deny
Exemption(s): B1
Declassify: (X) In Part () In Full
(X) Classify as C () Extend as — () Downgrade to —
Date 6/9/01 Declassify on — Reason 25X1

— BUENOS AIRES 2053

REFS: (a) Buenos Aires 1852, (b) Buenos Aires 1896
disappointed and angered

1. SUMMARY. High-ranking GOA officials are shaken, by our action.

They resent our inability to appreciate their view that their
vicious conflict requires "special tactics" and final solutions.

They fear that anything less than total annihilation of the
terrorists will spell a resurgence of the threat when the country
returns to normal civil rule. We see no evidence that they are
prepared to cede to external pressures in the foreseeable future.

At best they may be inclined to a cosmetic toning down of the
abuses in order to assuage international criticism. Our lines
of communication to the government are still open and they want
to minimize the damage to bilateral relations. "The people"

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~~SECRET~~
~~RF~~
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COWS

DRAFTED BY:

A/POLCOUNS:AGF:men:jr

DRAFTING DATE

3/16/77

TEL. EXT.

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[appear ambivalent on the issue, hoping to ^{avoid being involved.} ~~stay out of the~~ ~~way~~ ~~Businessmen~~, Argentine and American alike, are the most outspoken critics of our policy. A handful of human rights activists who deal directly with the victims and their families support us, but not openly. Others who abhor the government's repressive methods nevertheless suspect our motives, see us acting for egocentric reasons and equally condemn a policy of sanctions. END SUMMARY.

2. Government officials are hurt and are still assessing the repercussions of our action. They feel ^{let down.} ~~hurt~~. Their reaction is shaped by the conviction that in fighting for their own survival they also have been defending western values--and, coincidentally, US interests. It is further influenced by the fact that significant sectors in the armed forces see Argentina's ^{previous} ~~traditional~~ tilt toward Europe as an historical error and view their government as having initiated a process of ^{solidifying} ~~building~~ primary ties to the US. They do not comprehend how US interests possibly could be served through a violent takeover of Argentina by armed bands of loosely Marxist or nihilistic Argentine youth whose leaders originally were trained in Cuba. Although they have not asked for US material aid in dealing with the terrorist problem, they feel that they deserve our moral support and not this unkind blow from what they thought was a friendly power.

3. The casual manner in which the FMS cut was announced, the [unflattering comparison with Ethiopia, and the apparent US]

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double standard vis-a-vis South Korea and the Philippines further wounded their pride and heightened their anger. However, they carefully calibrated their response, because they wish to minimize damage to bilateral relations, if possible. They resisted the temptation to mount a demagogic political campaign against us because it would not serve their interests.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

4. There has been little perceptible reaction from the general public, one way or the other, perhaps because its primary concern is with domestic economic problems; perhaps because the prevailing attitude among

~~the prevailing attitude~~ the naturally apathetic Argentines ~~the~~ Ché

~~the prevailing attitude~~ seems to be "I'm all right, /~~Jack~~, " as long as it is some other fellow whose rights are being violated.

The reactions of special interest groups, however, vary considerably:

leisure class oligarchs and some foreign ambassadors (a) Argentine "estancieros", ~~and American businessmen~~ are

among the most vitriolic in condemning the US action. ~~The~~ American businessmen are also very upset. They ~~are also very upset~~ see our human rights policy as having evolved

in a vacuum filled by impractical people with strange political ideas, or worse, for which the businessmen particularly blame themselves for not having presented their own assessment of the Argentine situation to Congress more effectively. Put another way, they feel that the USG did not sort out US interests in Argentina realistically before taking the action we took. They fear that their business interests ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

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an Argentine backlash.
[~~policy~~ will suffer from a deterioration of Argentine-US relations.]

(b) What correspondence we have received has been uniformly critical, with one exception--a letter from an anonymous source whose next of kin disappeared at the hands of the security forces and who saw our action as a blow "for democracy." Individual churchmen and other human rights activists warmly endorsed our actions. Christian-oriented (CLAT) trade unionists who have built their careers on attacking US policies suddenly are warm and friendly. "Verticalist" Peronist labor politicians cynically are bemused by the controversy. They secretly are pleased to see us in a confrontation with the government, but take the view that the Montoneros are getting what they deserve. They probably would join any government attempt to demagogically exploit jingoistic or xenophobic impulses against us on this issue. However, we have noted that the previously existing tendency among labor leaders to distinguish sharply between trade union prisoners and subversive suspects appears to be breaking down; independent or neo-Peronist labor leaders are now more inclined to share our concern over human rights, but not in public.

(c) The attitude of "BA Herald" director Robert Cox is of special note because of his record of outspokenness on human rights. (Unfortunately his readership is very limited.) Cox believes we are pursuing the right policy for the wrong reasons, and he [bitterly opposes the sanctions approach. He sees our human]

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rights advocacy as an outgrowth of a guilt complex over Viet Nam and judges it a latter-day version of our traditional imperialistic impulse, i.e. just another empty-headed attempt to project our problems onto the world scene and impose our value systems on other peoples without due regard or much attention to their problems. His opposition to sanctions stems from a conviction that they not only do not work but are actually counterproductive.

(d) The views of other journalists are relevant here. Quite a few see the US stress on human rights as a cool Machiavelian calculation aimed primarily at the Soviet Union, with little concern for the impact on Latin America since this region has always come last in terms of US interests. Another writer, however, sees President Carter as a tragic Wilsonian figure doomed to failure because of his alleged unidimensional emphasis on moral concerns to the detriment of standard, traditional US interests.

5. Unlike the 1940s blow-up over "Braden or Peron," the key impact which has to be measured is that on the elite force most likely to control the country's destiny for the foreseeable future--the military. A siege mentality prevails in the military and in the upper levels of government. The terrorist problem literally has been a life or death matter for military men, policemen and their families. In an attempt to explain "their side" of the story, we have found high-ranking military

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contacts to be unusually and brutally frank about their aims and objectives in the last two weeks. We believe the official GOA denial that human rights violations take place is a bare-faced attempt at stonewalling the problem. The accusation that our FMS action is attributable to our ignorance of the situation in Argentina is merely official shorthand for expressing their distress over our disagreement with their methods. They say they are in a dirty, fratricidal war with an enemy who strikes in the dark and who occasionally turns out to be one's own son or daughter. Such a conflict requires special methods and a "final solution," they say. There can be only one objective, i.e. to liquidate the terrorists. If the military is eventually to return the country to civilian hands, it cannot afford to have large numbers of unrehabilitated terrorists languishing in the jails. Another Campora could come along and let them out and then the problem would start all over again. Therefore, they say, US sanctions cannot alter what they feel they must do and how they must do it. What they want us to believe is that by our actions we are merely aiding and abetting a common enemy. Inasmuch as the economic recovery of the country is deemed essential to destroying the terrorists' recruitment base
✓/there, they argue that US economic sanctions especially would contribute to the terrorist cause. (We find it particularly disturbing that the estimate of how long it will take to eradicate the terrorist problem keeps on extending. An

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admiral close to Massera told us last week that the Navy's estimate is now two years.)

6. There seems to be no basic disagreement between the so-called "moderates" and "hardliners" within the government with respect to these objectives. Videla may wish to tone down the excesses for public and international consumption, but there is no evidence that he wants or is able to do more than this. Quite the contrary, [] suggest that Videla, although concerned about increasing attacks from the US and the Vatican, sees no way other than pursuing the anti-terrorist campaign to its bitter end. We doubt that anything less than widescale, popular discontent with the government's repressive measures could induce it ~~to~~ suspend the most blatant and objectionable abuses. Even then they might easily be frightened into merely escalating the scale of repression. At any rate, we do not see sufficient domestic discontent developing on this issue in the near future.

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7. CONCLUSIONS:

(a) The way in which the FMS cut was announced wounded them. It convinced them that the USG considers Argentina unimportant and a country which can be singled out for punishment with impunity.

(b) The action was seen as a sanction--punishment by the USG, and not as disengagement or avoiding identification with the Argentine military regime.

GGAs (As the Foreign Minister himself said, our relations

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(FonMin himself said relations between US and Argentina had never been close. It was clear however that such warming in relations as had taken place over past year had now suffered a significant setback.)

(c) We see no indication that the reduction of FMS has had any positive effect on GOA thinking about their counter-terrorist tactics, having polled opinion at high levels in all three services on this.

(d) Alternate approaches: Recent research on the terrorist mentality collected by USIA has produced some insights which have been useful in dealing with terrorist incidents. Looking at the other side of the matter, we believe that the effects of terrorism on its victims produce attitudes which do not respond positively/~~to~~^{to} simple disapproval or punishment. We believe that if we are to be successful in improving GOA observance of human rights we must come up with policies which take into account the real fears (reasonable or not) of the officials of this government. As we go into the PARM cycle we shall be exploring these ideas further.


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